

# Faith Guides for Higher Education

## I s l a m



### ***A Guide to Islam***

Amjad Hussain and Kate El-Alami



Subject  
Centre for  
Philosophical &  
Religious Studies

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## A Guide to Islam

Amjad Hussain, Kate El-Alami

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## PREFACE TO THE FAITH GUIDE SERIES

In the 2001 National Census, over 70% of the UK population identified themselves as belonging to a religious community; and the issue of religion is rarely out of the news, often being discussed in relation to highly-charged controversy and emotion. There is often a lack of understanding as to what a religion is, and what it means to be a member (or not) of a specific faith group. Confusion can result in all walks of life and higher education (HE) is not exempt from this. Indeed, institutions are increasingly, and with varying degrees and different levels of success, seeking to respond to and understand specific faith requirements, as they relate (or not) to particular areas of higher education, in continually changing contexts. This series of *Faith Guides* from the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies will not necessarily solve all the controversies or confusion, but may bring some answers to some of these basic questions, through providing individuals, departments, and institutions with resource information on issues relating to teaching people of faith in a higher education environment.

The introduction of the *Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003* suggested a broader social commitment in the UK to the creation of culturally inclusive places of work. Following their introduction, not only is there an ethical and moral duty to consciously avoid discrimination on the basis of religion and belief, but there is now a statutory duty. Both the Home Office and the Department for International Development have expressed their commitment towards working more closely with faith communities and encouraging interfaith dialogue. All these developments suggest a need for staff in UK higher education institutions to develop the skills and knowledge that reflect this growing concern for cultural and religious literacy in British society. This series offers an accessible route into this area of knowledge. By providing concise guides, all those involved in the higher education academic process have an opportunity to quickly acquire a basic awareness of issues, in a format as free from jargon as possible.

The Subject Centre has brought together a broad range of subject specialists who can draw upon their personal experiences of and interactions with specific faith groups and individuals, acquired through their own academic work, and in some cases utilising personal experiences as members of a particular tradition. The guides detail students' feelings about modern life on campus; information obtained through the authors' longstanding teaching experience and, in some cases, informal focus groups set up to garner student opinion.

The rich variety of issues contained in this series of guides acknowledges substantial diversity within and between faith groups, in particular in relation to identity issues and ideas about what it means to be religious. The format for each guide has some stress on a commonality of themes, but has allowed authors the opportunity to explore themes that are individual and specific to a particular world view. Editing this series has

raised some interesting issues, and it is acknowledged that it is not possible to accommodate perspectives as varied as Buddhism, Islam and New Age in the same format—and that there are disparate (and occasionally conflicting) perspectives within diverse faiths, not all of which can be referred to within a series of concise guides. This series is not intended to be a ‘politically correct’ tool, but seeks instead to support the enrichment of the teaching and learning experience for all those engaged within the higher education sector. It is based on the idea of encouraging awareness and understanding of the cultural and religious dynamics of student experience in higher education, with a view to supporting the development and sharing of good practice.

In tackling these concerns, the guides seek to provide a basic introduction to religious world views, before tackling some general issues associated with students and staff from specific faith backgrounds, and their interactions in the higher education sector. It also provides advice on where to go for further information. The series will thereby save the reader time and effort in locating significant source material and advice on higher education issues associated with faith communities and individuals.

This series will be expanded to accommodate further religious (and other) world views, including some of those related to the religions contained in the initial set of titles, and updates to the present volumes will also be provided in due course—so feedback to the present series would be particularly welcomed. The editor is grateful for the input of all the authors in the evolution of this series, and to members of the Subject Centre and its Advisory Board who provided significant contributions at every stage of the production process.

All web links listed in this guide were correct and verified at the time of publication.

Further information and resources on issues relating to diversity can be found on our website at:

**<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/themes/diversity/index.html>**.

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## NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

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## I. INTRODUCING ISLAM

**T**his section is designed to present a concise overview of Islam. It will summarise and present the history of Islam, its belief structure and ways of worship.

Today, Islam is numerically the second largest religion in the world, claiming, according to a range of estimates, somewhere between 1.2 and 1.5 billion adherents, more than one fifth of the population of the world.

The word Islam means ‘submission’ or ‘surrender’ and a Muslim is ‘one who surrenders’ (to the will of God), not in the sense of defeat or subjugation but in the sense of total devotion of the heart and mind to God and living one’s life accordingly.

To most Muslims, Islam is not simply a religion but ‘a way of life’. Muslims believe that Islam is a system that encompasses all spheres of life, social and personal. Islam provides a social and legal system and governs issues such as family life, law and order, ethics, dress and cleanliness, as well as religious ritual and observance.

It is important to understand, however, that various levels of observance exist amongst Muslims. Some Muslims prefer their religion to be a private matter while others may want it to be the basis of all of their social interaction.

Although Islam in the form in which we recognise it today is a relatively young religion, which originated in Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula through the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)<sup>1</sup>, Muslims believe that Islam is a universal religion. They believe it to have started with the first human and continued through time under various names, the constant element being the message that God is one.

Muslims are of many races and include almost all nationalities. Although there are elements that unite all Muslims, there are important differences between Muslims due to their national and cultural backgrounds. In UK higher education there are significant numbers of overseas Muslim students as well as British Muslims. Many British Muslim students have more in common socially with non-Muslim British students than they have with overseas Muslim students. The phenomenon of a ‘British Islam’ is one which is growing and, while acknowledging its origins, increasingly aspires to be recognised in its own right and not seen as a foreign element in British society.

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<sup>1</sup> See **Some Commonly Used Expressions**—page 13

## ISLAM IN HISTORY AND KEY DIVISIONS

### LIFE OF THE PROPHET

Islam arose in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century in the city of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula as, in the view of Muslims, the culmination of the great monotheistic tradition of Judaism and Christianity. The received history of the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the early years of Islam is central to the belief of Muslims worldwide, in much the same way as the biblical life of Christ is central to the belief of Christians. Muhammad was born in Mecca in the year 570 CE<sup>2</sup>. The city was well known to be a commercial centre and a place for pilgrimage for the pagan Arabs. The majority of the inhabitants of Mecca belonged to the Quraysh tribe, a tribe that was subdivided into numerous autonomous clans. The heart of Mecca was the Kaaba, a cube shaped building that Muslims believe had been established by Abraham and his son, Isma'il, for the worship of the One God. By the time Muhammad was born the Kaaba was filled with idols that the Arabs worshipped. In the year 610, when Muhammed was 40, he began to receive revelations from God through the Angel Jibril (Gabriel). The main message that Muhammad was to convey to his people was that there was only One God and that Muhammad was the last Prophet of God. However, very few of the inhabitants listened to him and slowly the leading elite of Mecca started to persecute anybody who accepted Muhammad's message. According to Islamic traditional sources Muhammad continued to receive revelations from God over a period of some 23 years. In 622, the small number of Meccan Muslims emigrated to Medina (an oasis city 200 miles from Mecca) many of whose people embraced Islam. Thus, Medina became the first Islamic city state, where Muhammad was both a political and religious leader. During this period the continued revelations dealt with issues concerned with the establishment of an Islamic society. The growth of Islam in Medina and amongst other tribes in Arabia led to military clashes with the Meccans, which continued until Mecca was conquered by the Muslims in the year 630 and the Kaaba was purged of its idols. Muhammad died in the year 632, leaving the whole of the Arabian Peninsula under the control of the Muslims.

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<sup>2</sup> Common Era is used here, being synonymous with the 'Christian Era' or 'AD'.



## **RISE OF ISLAM**

From the year 632-661 CE the Muslim capital was Medina, with the first four Caliphs (the successors to Muhammad from amongst his closest companions) ruling consecutively as leaders of the Muslim community. During this time Persia and the eastern Byzantine provinces were conquered by Muslims.

Following the era of the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs', the Umayyad Dynasty made Damascus the capital of the Islamic empire. Islam expanded into Africa, Spain, central Asia and the Indian sub-continent. The Umayyad dynasty lasted for over 90 years.

In 750 CE the Abbasid dynasty overthrew the Umayyads and ruled the Muslim world from Baghdad for the next 500 years. Some historians label this Islam's 'Golden Age'. During the reign of Caliph Haroun Al Rashid (786-809) and his successors, Baghdad became the cultural centre of the Islamic world. In particular, during the period of the reign of Al-Ma'mun (819-833) the Islamic empire experienced a remarkable cultural revolution, which included the composition of poetry and literature and translation of works of science and philosophy from other languages (notably Greek) into Arabic, preserving and propagating the ancient classics. Muslims arrived in Spain in 711 CE, and, following a sequence of conquests, ruled various territories in the Iberian peninsula through a complex series of dynasties, emirates and kingdoms, until the final reconquest by Christians in 1492.

The power of the Abbasid dynasty was broken by the Mongol conquest in 1258 CE. Muslim leadership was then assumed by the Mamluks in Egypt.

From Egypt the leadership of the Muslims was transferred to Istanbul in the 16<sup>th</sup> century where the Caliphate of the Ottoman Empire, which controlled most of the Middle East, the eastern Mediterranean and significant parts of Europe, lasted until 1923, when it was abolished by secular nationalist Ataturk of Turkey.

## **SHI'A/SUNNI**

Approximately 90% of the Muslims in the world are Sunnis, and most of the remainder are Shiites. The differences between Shiites and Sunnis are principally in three areas; succession, authority and the law. After the Prophet's death the Shi'a (literally 'party' or 'faction' [ie of Ali]) believed that Ali, the cousin of the Prophet and husband of his daughter Fatima, should have succeeded him, followed by his descendants, who were given the title 'Imam'. The Shiite notion of the Imam is that he is a political and spiritual figure whereas the Sunnis see the Imam as just one leader amongst many. Legal matters that vary between the two include issues of marriage and inheritance. In everyday student life, however, the two factions are very often similar, both calling themselves 'Muslim' before 'Shiite' or 'Sunnii'.

## THE BELIEF STRUCTURE OF ISLAM

**T**he belief system in Islam is commonly explained by referring to the six articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam. The six articles of faith outline what Muslims are required to believe in and the five pillars refer to the actions that Muslims are obliged to perform.

### THE SIX ARTICLES OF FAITH

#### Allah

Allah is an Arabic word, which means the One God. By definition, every Muslim believes in God who is known to be the Creator and the Sustainer of all things that exist. Islam holds that God transcends the possession of any physical attributes, and is not bound by any of the limitations of human beings or of anything else. He has no parents, no children, no associates and no partners. God is, however, described by His '99 names', such as the Creator, Sustainer, the Merciful, the Light and the Forgiver.

#### Angels

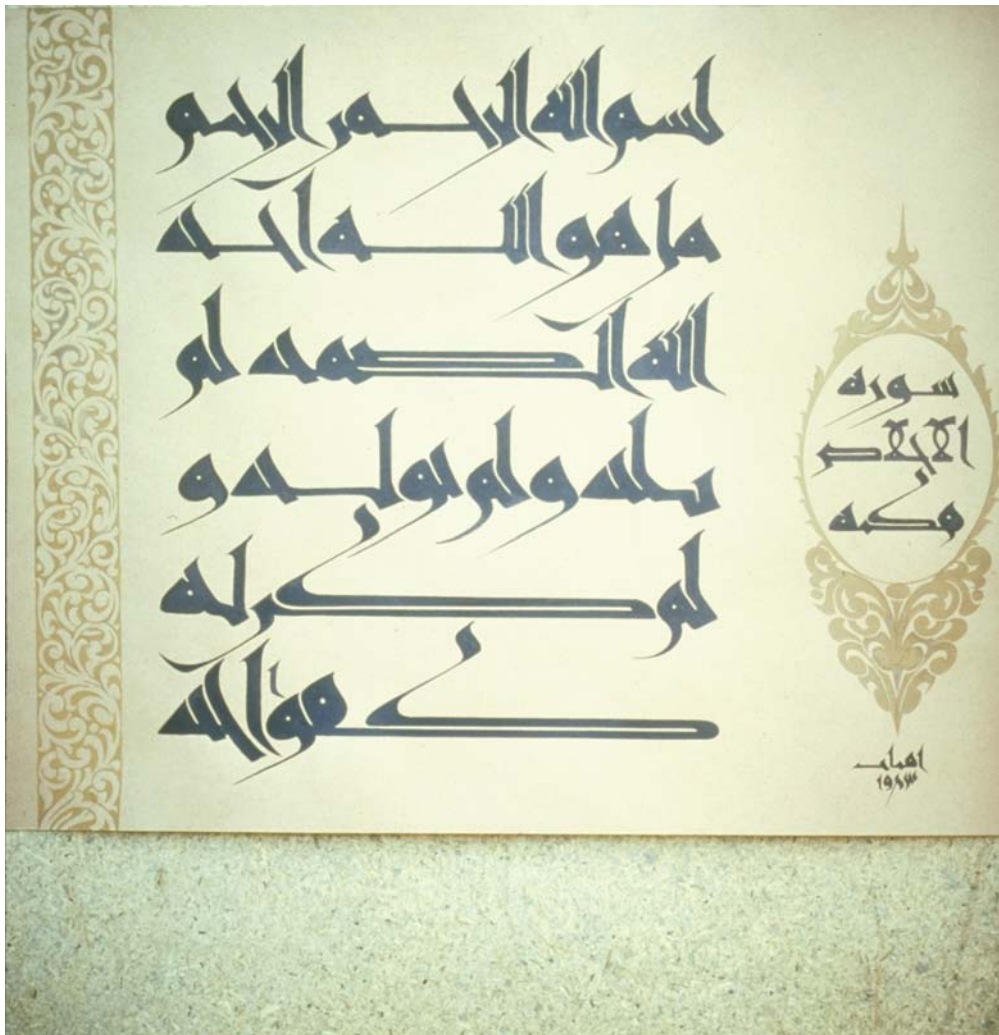
Muslims believe that Angels are created by God from light. They are not to be confused with the classical western images of angels in human form with wings and halos, nor with ghosts. Angels are an entirely different creation to humans, and unlike humans they have not been given free will. Angels are there to do the bidding of their Lord, for example the Angel of Death, angels who record everything that happens to a person, and angels who delivered revelations to Prophets.

#### Prophets or Messengers

In Islam, the word Prophet does not indicate a person who prophesies the future. It refers to a human being who is chosen by God to convey His Message and to guide other humans. Muslims believe in all the prophets, or messengers, that God has chosen, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elijah, Job, Jonah, Zachariah, John the Baptist, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon all of God's prophets). Since Islam is a universal religion throughout the history of humankind, Muslims believe that God continuously revealed Divine Guidance to prophets until the last Guidance was given to the Prophet Muhammad.

#### The Revealed Scriptures

Muslims believe that God revealed four major scriptures to humankind through his Prophets. Thus, Muslims believe that the Torah was given to Moses, the Psalms to David, the Gospel to Jesus and the Qur'an to Muhammad. They believe, however, that the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel in their original form have been lost as the scriptures were altered and corrupted by human beings. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is now the only Revealed Scripture that has not been changed from its original form.



**‘Say: He is God, the One, God the Eternal; He does not beget, nor is He begotten; There is none like Him.’ Qur’an, Sura *al-Ikhlâs* (Purity) 112:1-4.**

### **The Hereafter**

Muslims believe that this life is very short in comparison with the life hereafter. Muslims are required to have faith in the reality of the hereafter, the Day of Judgement, Resurrection, Paradise and Hell.

### **Divine Decree**

The last article of faith is the belief in God’s decree. Muslims believe that God has power over everything. All that happens is according to His Will, thus nothing is supernatural or random. However, Muslims are not fatalistic—they are given free will and enjoined to strive to do their best in all situations since human beings do not know where their destiny lies. Thus, they must exhaust all possible means and when the inevitable occurs (good or bad) it is to be taken with patience and trusting acceptance of the infinite wisdom of God.

## **THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM**

### **Shahada**

Shahada is an Arabic word which means testimony or witness. The Shahada is the testimony of faith that every Muslim makes, either when she or he becomes Muslim or simply through rituals such as formal prayers. It is necessary to declare or accept the Shahada at least once in a lifetime to be a Muslim. The Shahada consists of these words, 'I testify that there is no deity except God, and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God'.

### **Salat**

Salat is an Arabic word, which is better understood as 'ritual prayers'. Muslims pray five times a day. The formal prayers are in a rigid form at fixed times during the day. Muslims can pray anywhere as long as the place is clean. The formal prayers can be carried out at home or in mosques or schools and can be prayed either alone or in a group with an Imam. Muslims are first required to perform wudhu or ritual ablution. Then they pray facing the city of Mecca, or as close to the exact direction as possible. Prayer compasses are available that allow Muslims to find the approximate direction of Mecca from different parts of the world, by aligning the north-finding compass needle with a numbered point on the circumference of the compass corresponding to the nearest major city, and then praying in the direction of a fixed arrow on the compass face. The five formal prayer times are at dawn, mid-day, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall. Although some Muslims try to pray at the precise time of the call to prayer, this is not always possible. It is permitted to perform any of the prayers between the call to prayer for that particular prayer and the call to prayer for the following prayer (except the dawn prayer which should be performed before sunrise). Where a person's professional or other important responsibilities or commitments do not allow him or her to pray at the appointed time (in extreme cases) it is permitted to perform missed prayers together with later prayers. Muslims can also offer supplications (du'a) to God; this can be done anywhere and anytime. The formal prayers include standing, bowing, prostration and sitting, while reciting sections from the Qur'an and praising and glorifying God. Although many people may imagine that five formal prayers are a burden, as part of a daily routine they do not take a great deal of time. Most practising Muslims see Salat as a way to get closer to God and to keep God in mind in their daily lives.

### **Zakat**

Zakat is an Arabic word whose root meaning is to purify. Zakat is an obligatory charity that purifies one's own wealth by giving to those less fortunate. The obligatory charity of one fortieth (2.5 %) is due on the wealth which is saved in one year; that is, on money that is not spent towards meeting one's needs. Normal charity, which is called sadaqa, is also strongly recommended in Islam. This can be given anywhere and anytime.

## **Siyam**

Siyam is an Arabic word for fasting during Ramadan (Sawm Shahr Ramadan—the Ramadan Fast). Muslims fast from dawn until sunset every day during Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar and each month begins at the sighting of the new moon. While the Gregorian calendar is 365 or 366 days long, the lunar calendar is shorter since it comprises 12 lunar months, amounting to 354 or 355 days. Accordingly, Ramadan falls 11 days earlier in each Gregorian year and so over a period of 33 years Ramadan moves through all the seasons to come back to where it commenced. Fasting entails refraining from any kind of food or drink, smoking and sexual relations between dawn and sunset. Those who are sick, elderly, or on a journey are permitted to break the fast, while women who are menstruating, pregnant or nursing are specifically enjoined not to fast. They should, however, make up an equal number of days later in the year if they are healthy and able. The length of the fasting day depends on the time of year that Ramadan falls and obviously the difference between summer and winter is more pronounced the further north one travels.

## **Hajj**

Hajj is an Arabic word, which translates as pilgrimage. Every Muslim is required to make the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime. A person who is unable to do so due to illness or lack of finances is, however, excused. A person who has debts does not need to make pilgrimage until he or she has settled all debts.



**The Hajj, Mecca**

## UK CALENDAR OF ISLAMIC FESTIVALS

**T**here are two major festivals in Islam that all Muslims celebrate, Eid-ul-Adha and Eid ul-Fitr, but there are several others that are celebrated only by certain Muslim groups.

### EID UL-ADHA

Eid-ul-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice) is celebrated throughout the Muslim world as a commemoration of Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail to God. Eid-ul-Adha is celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Dhu al Hijja (12<sup>th</sup> month of the Muslim Lunar calendar). It celebrates the ending of the pilgrimage to Mecca, during which each pilgrim sacrifices (or has sacrificed on their behalf) a sheep, goat, cow or camel. Houses are decorated, people go to the Mosque to pray the formal Eid Prayer, they exchange gifts, visit friends and family and come together for a celebration meal in the evening. It is normal for Muslim students to ask for two to three days to celebrate this festival.

### EID UL-FITR:

Eid ul-Fitr or the feast of the breaking of the fast is celebrated on the first day after the month of Ramadan and continues for three days in a similar manner to Eid al-Adha. It is normal for Muslim students to want to take a few days off before the festival commences to fast the last few days of Ramadan with their families and prepare for Eid.

### Note regarding Ramadan

As a matter of simple courtesy non-Muslims may consider refraining from eating, drinking or smoking openly in the presence of Muslims who are fasting during the day in Ramadan. Where Ramadan falls during the winter months and the breaking of the fast is before the end of the working day, it is normal for Muslims who are fasting to wish to be able to break the fast and pray the sunset prayer at the appropriate time, and allowance should be made for this where possible. It is not unusual for Muslims who are fasting to appear tired and lethargic, or to lose concentration as the day progresses, and these tendencies may become more pronounced as the month goes on. This is partly due to the fasting itself during the day and partly to disrupted sleep patterns, as people tend to stay up late at night in social and family gatherings during Ramadan, and wake up early for a pre-dawn meal. Although most Muslim students who fast will attempt to carry on their studies as normal during Ramadan, this should be taken into account in the classroom situation.

### LAILATUL-MI'RAJ

Lailatul-mi'raj celebrates the night of the ascent, when the Prophet ascended to heaven. This festival occurs on the 27<sup>th</sup> day in the month of Rajab, the 7<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic lunar calendar.



## MUHARRAM

The festival of Muharram celebrates the Islamic New Year's Day. The first month of the Islamic calendar is also called Muharram. This festival lasts for ten days. The first eight days are counted from New Year's Day. These days are labelled as the First of Muharram, the Second of Muharram, etc. The 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> or the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> are celebrated through fasting. The 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram is called the 'Ashura'. This fasting was commenced by the Prophet Muhammad to celebrate the day Prophet Moses saved the people of Israel from the Pharaoh.

## AL-MAWLID-AN-NABAWI

Al-Mawlid-an-Nabawi celebrates the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. He was born on the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> day in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal, the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of the Islamic year. According to the Gregorian calendar, this would be August 20<sup>th</sup>, 570 AD. The Prophet died 63 years later on the same day. This day may be celebrated with parties and other gatherings. Muslim students may plan to go home for this festival but some celebrate it in the evening with their friends.



A stained glass window by Simon Trethaway

## ISLAMIC TERMS

### **FATWA**

A Fatwa is a formal legal opinion, in response to a question or query, given by a Mufti or religious scholar qualified to give such an opinion. It may be on any topic. It does not mean 'death sentence'.

### **HADITH**

Reports on the sayings and the actions of the Prophet and what he witnessed and approved of are called Hadith. Hadith were collected following the death of the Prophet and organised by scholars in a number of collections, the most famous of which are known by the names of the scholars who produced them.

### **HIJAB**

The word Hijab is usually used to refer to the head covering worn by many Muslim women. While the head covering is the most visible element, the wearing of Hijab involves adopting an overall modest form of dress (see **Dress Code** on page 18).

### **IMAM**

The Imam is the prayer leader. Islam has no priesthood, so the Imam is not ordained to the mosque. Any Muslim may lead the prayer as long as they know how to do it. For practical purposes, however, an Imam may be appointed to a mosque by its governing body to lead the prayer and to offer pastoral care to the community.

### **JIHAD**

Jihad means 'striving'; this can take the form of any personal effort, spiritual or physical, to do God's will in the world. It can mean to strive against sin and sinful acts both in one's own life and in society. Contrary to the impression given in the media in recent times, it does not mean 'holy war', although it may include military action in defence of Muslims and Islamic lands.

### **MOSQUE**

The Arabic word for the Mosque is 'masjid' which literally means 'a place for prostration'. Prayer rooms in universities are therefore also usually referred to as mosques by Muslims who congregate there. Besides being a place where Muslims may perform any or all of their five daily prayers and where the Friday congregational prayer and sermon takes place, the mosque is generally the focal point for the Muslim community, where



educational and social gatherings may take place and festivals are celebrated.

## NIQAB

The word Niqab refers to a veil that usually covers the entire face except for the eyes. Some Muslim women chose to wear the niqab with the hijab.

## QUR'AN

The holy book of Islam is called the Qur'an. Islamic tradition teaches that it was revealed to Muhammad from God through the Angel Gabriel for a period of 23 years. There is only one Qur'an and it is in the Arabic language. The Qur'an is composed of 114 Suras (chapters). It is to be read or recited accurately and according to precise rules of pronunciation and punctuation. The Qur'an is always recited in Arabic, even by non Arabic speakers. Any translation is considered to be merely an explanation of the meaning of the Qur'an.

Due to its sacred nature, there are rules and etiquette with regard to handling, reading or reciting the Qur'an. Muslims always perform wudhu or ritual ablution before touching the Qur'an or reciting it. They show respect to the holy book by not placing it on the floor but always on a stand or table.



Illuminated Ottoman Qur'an, 17<sup>th</sup> century

## **SHARI'A**

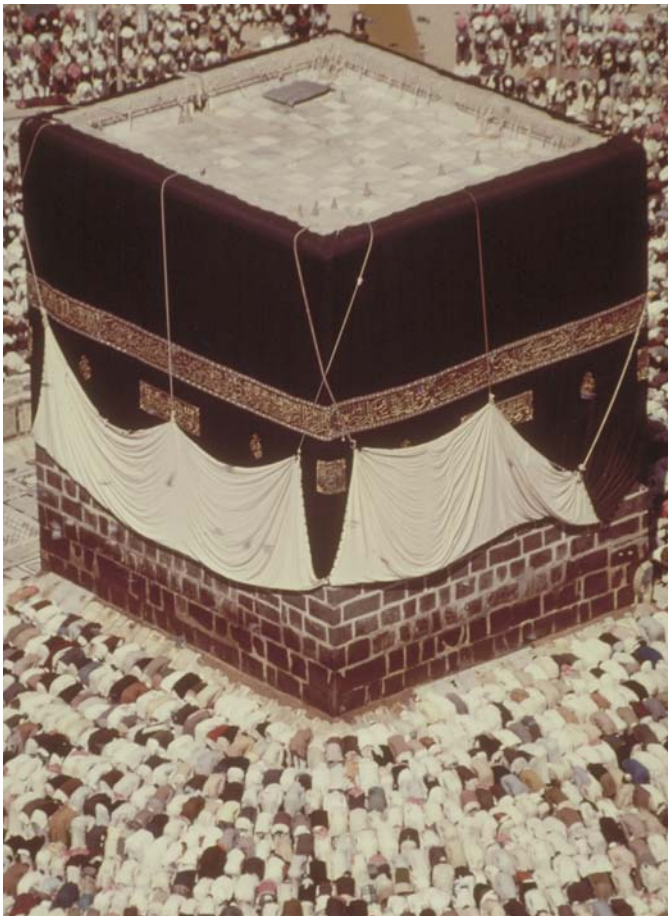
The Shari'a is the revealed and the canonical laws of the religion of Islam. The two major sources of law in Islam are the Qur'an and the Sunna; the rules from these two sources as interpreted and expounded by the classical jurists of the first centuries of Islam constitute the Shari'a.

## **SUFISM**

The Arabic word for Sufism is 'Tasawwuf'. Sufism can most simply be described as the inner dimension or spirituality of Islam. There are various orders or 'tariqas' in Sufism, some of which involve a degree of mysticism; all of them, however, base their spirituality upon the words of the Qur'an.

## **SUNNA**

Sunna means habit, custom or way of life, in particular that of the Prophet Muhammad, which is the example that all Muslims look to. The Hadith are reports on the Sunna. The Sunna may confirm what is mentioned in the Qur'an, interpret and explain it, specify what is meant by some general verses, limit and restrict the meaning of some verse in it, or may explain something that has been revealed in the Qur'an. In a more general sense it is the model of behaviour for Muslims.



**Kaaba, Mecca**

## SOME COMMONLY USED EXPRESSIONS

### **PEACE BE UPON HIM**

The entire phrase or the initial letters are used after all the Prophets' names. The whole phrase will be used when a Prophet's name is used in speech, but the initials will be used more commonly in writing or print, especially in religiously-oriented or authored publications aimed at a Muslim readership. The term has been used once in the context of this guide.

### **INSHA'ALLAH**

Insha'Allah means 'if God wills'. It is used by Muslims whenever a statement about the future is made. It averts the assumption that human beings can control what they will do or what will happen in the future without God's will, for example: 'I will see you at the lecture tomorrow, insha'Allah.'

### **AL-HAMDU LI'LLAH**

This means, 'Thanks/praise be to God'. This is a standard response to anything good or pleasant that occurs, and also to the enquiry, 'How are you?'

### **BISMILLAHIL-RAHMAN AL-RAHIM**

This means, 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful'. Muslims are encouraged to say this when commencing any action from writing an essay to starting the engine of a car or serving or starting to eat a meal. They may also write it at the top of documents including letters, essays or exam papers.

## ISLAM IN BRITAIN

The opening of the Suez Canal in the late 1860s brought the first significant number of Muslims into Britain from Yemen and other Middle Eastern countries. Many Muslim sailors, who worked mostly in the engine rooms of British merchant navy ships (up to the middle of the 20th century) settled in port towns such as Cardiff and Liverpool, and industrial towns such as Sheffield where they found work in the steel industry. Some of these early settlers eventually brought wives and families to Britain but many married locally. In the 19th century, due to the spread of the British Empire into Muslim countries, there was significant interest in Islam and 'the Orient'. William H. Quilliam, a lawyer from Liverpool, visited Morocco in 1887 and became a Muslim. He founded the Liverpool mosque, the first in Britain, and the Muslim Institute, and published the weekly Muslim magazine 'The Crescent'. The second mosque to be built in Britain was the Woking Mission in 1889, which was initially established by Dr Leitner, a Hungarian Orientalist. Khwaja Kamaluddin from India arrived there in 1912 and continued the work on the mosque.

Large scale immigration of Muslims into Britain only started in the late 1950s due to two main factors—the partition of British India and the creation of Pakistan (East and West) and the construction of the Mangla Dam in Pakistan in the early 1960s which submerged some 250 villages in the Mirpur District. In the 1970s large numbers of Indians who had been part of successful settled business communities in Uganda fled the brutal regime of Idi Amin, and following the 1974 partition of Cyprus many Turkish Cypriots came to Britain. During the 1980s and 1990s further groups of Muslims arrived in Britain, mainly as refugees. These included Afghans, Somalis, Kurds, Bosnians and Algerians.

Clearly, then, although they share their faith, Muslims in Britain are not a homogenous group. They differ not only in national and ethnic identity but also in terms of class, education and ideological standpoints. According to the 2001 Census there are between 1.5 and 2.5 million Muslims in Britain today and 80% of these are of Indian sub-continent descent. Approximately 10,000 of Britain's Muslims are white or African-Caribbean converts (who may prefer to be called reverts, having 'reverted' to the true and original faith). The rest of the Muslim population comprises Turks, Arabs, Persians, Africans and many other ethnicities. In the late 1990s 839 mosques and 950 Muslim organisations were fully functioning in Britain. In addition, there are 45 primary and 52 secondary Muslim schools, only 3 of which are state funded.

While most early economic migrants believed that they would eventually return to their homes, today the Muslim community in Britain is relatively settled and integrated with the rest of the British society. The idea of 'going home one day' has no meaning for most British Muslims of the second or third generation, who largely consider themselves to be British when it comes to nationality. However, the Muslim youth of Britain cannot be seen as a homogenous group; young people may live according to cultural or religious laws or customs or follow a completely secular approach to their lives. Muslims in the UK continue to face racism, and to be disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion, issues which

were of great concern to the Muslim students we surveyed. In addition, many feel themselves under continuous intense scrutiny, particularly since the 2001 attacks on the United States and the emergence of al-Qaeda. The term 'Islamophobia' has recently come into common usage to describe a form of fear and hatred of Islam and Muslims based on a perceived threat (however unfounded) to Western societies.

At present religious discrimination is not recognised by British law in the same way that racial discrimination has been for thirty years or so. The identity of many British Muslims today is based on faith and not on ethnicity. The law can protect Pakistanis or Arabs in the case of ethnic discrimination but not a Muslim woman who is white and wearing hijab (although this may change in the near future with proposed legislation).



**Shah Jehan Mosque, Woking**



## DEBUNKING COMMON STEREOTYPES

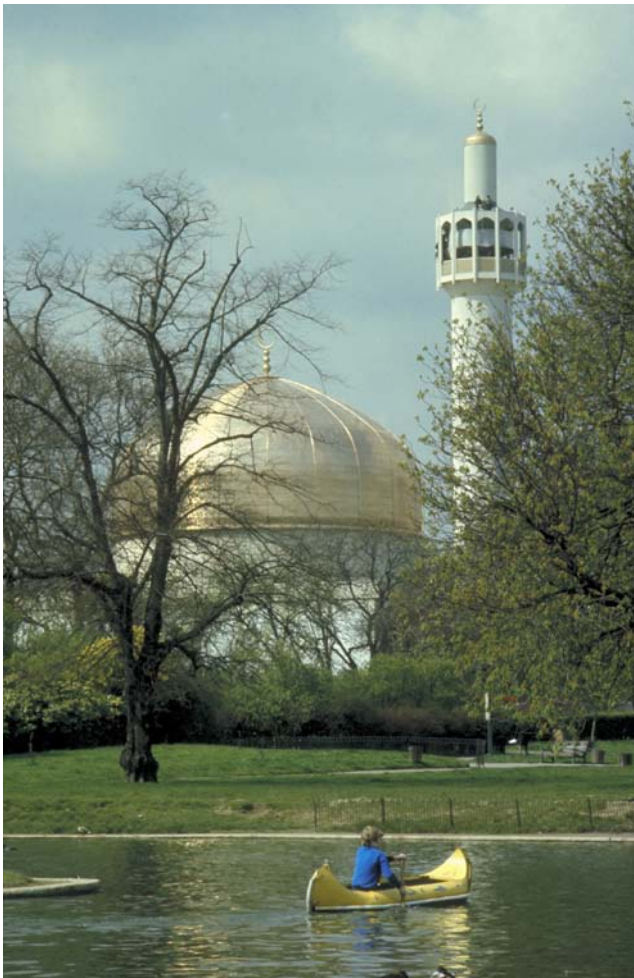
Muslims of many backgrounds in higher education have identified a number of stereotypes that they believe are fallacious:

Many Muslim students after the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks in the United States and the 7<sup>th</sup> July attacks in the UK feel that Muslims and Islam are all branded as terrorists or extremists, especially if Muslim men grow beards and Muslim women wear the hijab or niqab.

Muslim students feel that their devotion to the faith is sometimes seen as backward and out of place. For example, society seems not to understand that Islam for practising Muslims is a way of life and not simply a matter to be kept private behind four walls.

Muslims students feel that the gender issue in the higher education environment is misunderstood. They feel that other people assume that Muslim women students wearing either hijab or niqab are oppressed.

Due to Muslim students having strict laws on food, drink and sex, they feel that they are marginalised as fanatic or extremist, whereas other groups may simply be called 'conservative'.



**The Regent's Park Mosque, London**

## 2. SPECIFIC ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**T**here are a significant number of British Muslims and Muslim international students in British universities. This section will summarise various issues that are important for Muslim students in a higher education milieu.

### KEY SENSITIVITIES

**M**uslim men and women on campuses across Britain can be very sensitive to provocative dress by men and women. In Islamic teaching both men and women are asked to look away from men and women that dress to 'arouse' the other sex.

Obscene language and swearing are offensive to Muslim students.

Muslims can be highly sensitive to higher education activities and meetings taking place in surroundings where alcohol is served or consumed. The majority of practising Muslims would prefer to avoid such places.

### MORAL, ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL ISSUES

#### **SEXUAL RELATIONS**

Islam forbids absolutely any sexual activity before marriage. In addition to that, Islam also has a strong view of 'indecent' behaviour between the sexes. Thus, many Muslim students avoid any activities organised by Student Unions that break these rules. Some examples of these activities are dancing, field trips and meetings that involve close contact between men and women.

#### **HOMOSEXUALITY**

As a whole, the scholars of Islam agree that Islam as a religion forbids homosexuality. Many Muslims feel strongly on this issue and find themselves labelled as homophobic or extremist due to their religious views.

## **FOOD CODE**

Muslims follow a strict dietary law. Pork is prohibited, as are its by-products in any form. The by-products of pork can be found in various food items such as gelatine in cakes, sweets and ice creams. Muslims will generally not be happy to eat other foods that have come into contact or been served with pork or pork products, for instance cheese sandwiches that have been served on a plate with ham sandwiches or sausage rolls (most vegetarians would be equally unhappy with this) or other meats handled or cut with utensils that have been used for handling pork.

Meat products containing blood are prohibited. Islamic slaughter of an animal involves a swift slit to the throat while pronouncing Bismillah, Allahu Akbar, which means, 'In the name of God, God is the Greatest'. The animal is then bled completely. This makes the meat Halal.

Any food over which the name of a deity other than God has been pronounced is prohibited.

Amongst Muslims there are two opinions with regard to eating meat from non-Muslim butchers or other shops such as supermarkets. One is that it is prohibited and that the animal has to be slaughtered by Islamic code. The second opinion is that it is permissible (except for pork) since no deity's name has been pronounced over the animal.

Muslims are not permitted to consume alcohol or anything that contains alcohol or any other substances that intoxicate or interfere with the clear functioning of the mind, in any quantity or form.

Most seafood and all vegetables are permissible.

## **DRESS CODE**

Islam does not recommend a particular style of dress for men and women and Islamic dress should not be confused with traditional ethnic dress. Some Muslims choose to wear Asian attire, Arab attire or European attire according to their own ethnic background or personal taste. It is not necessary for a convert (or revert) to adopt any form of ethnic dress as these are not innately Islamic. All that is required is to observe the guidelines relating to modesty:

Men should cover their body from the navel to the knees. Men are not allowed to wear pure silk or gold items.

Many Muslim women choose to cover their head with a headscarf, often referred to as hijab. The majority of Muslim scholars of both genders believe that according to the Islamic sources, women are to cover their whole body with clothes, except face, hands and feet, when outside the immediate family circle. They do not need to be covered when they are in exclusively female company, nor in the company of male family members within the degrees of relationship that prohibit marriage (i.e. father, grandfather, brother, son, uncle). They should, however, be covered in the company of male cousins since cousin marriage is permitted in Islam. Some Muslim women choose to cover their face with the niqab, a veil that covers the face except for the eyes.



Neither men nor women are allowed to wear clothes that are revealing, skin-tight or see-through.

## **ISLAMIC SOCIETIES**

Most higher education institutes with a significant number of Muslim students have an 'Islamic Society' which is generally based in the prayer rooms at the university campus. For all of the Islamic societies in the United Kingdom and Ireland there is an umbrella organisation FOSIS, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies in the UK and Ireland.

There are various platforms and organisations within the Islamic societies. Some may be spiritually inclined while others are more political. In their relationships with each other, Muslims within these Islamic societies may fall into social groups based on national identity such as Pakistanis, Malaysians, Turks, Arabs or British Muslims. On the other hand they may be known through their affiliation to Muslim organisations; for example some Muslim students may be part of the Sufi order, Naqshbandi, thus they would be known amongst other Muslims as Naqshbandis. Others may be known to be part of the Hizb Tahrir, Muslim Brotherhood, Islami Jamiat or Salafi, and others may simply have no affiliation at all. These differences may not be immediately apparent to non-Muslims but they are important in the dynamics of Muslim communities. One thing many have common is their support, whether active or tacit, of specific political causes such as the wish for independence for Palestine, Chechnya and Kashmir.

## PARTICIPATION

### FIELD TRIPS

Muslim students would insist on separate places to sleep for men and women. They often feel left out during field trips as leisure activities are very often centred on the pub. There is a need to be aware that Muslims may be offended by activities that demand close contact between the sexes. In addition, religious studies trips need to take in account the strong view in Islam of Muslims not participating in the worship of other religions.

Many Muslims would not object to visits to religious buildings of the other monotheistic or Abrahamic faiths acknowledged by Islam (churches and synagogues) but some would feel uncomfortable. A greater proportion might find it problematic to visit Hindu temples or Buddhist monasteries as they are not in the monotheistic/Abrahamic tradition. A majority of Muslims students would not wish to eat anything that was blessed in a religious temple.

### COURSE CONTENT

Another issue is the teaching of subjects that Muslims may not agree with. In biology and archaeology the theory of Evolution may not be accepted by Muslims who believe in the story of Adam and Eve, although not all Muslims see the theories of evolution and creation as mutually exclusive.

### SOCIAL EVENTS

As noted above, some Muslim students will feel uncomfortable about social events held in pubs or bars. Some will feel unhappy about being in a non-commercial environment (such as a hall or home) where alcohol is consumed, but others will not mind if non-Muslims are consuming alcohol in moderation provided this is in a social setting that is not focused on the drinking of alcohol and where they are not made to feel excluded by not drinking. Sensitivities with regard to the serving of food should be observed (see dietary code above) just as they would be for vegetarians. (In fact, if in doubt, vegetarian food is always a safe option).

### USE OF MEDIA

Practising Muslim students feel very uncomfortable with nakedness and sexual acts being depicted in the media.

## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

**T**here are several factors which may improve recruitment and retention of Muslim students.

### **PROVISION OF A LIST OF MOSQUES AND OTHER ISLAMIC ORGANISATIONS**

Many Muslims would like to have information about relevant Muslim organisations close to the higher education institute, particularly mosques and the closest Halal shops where they may buy their meat.

### **PROVISION OF PRAYER ROOMS**

Muslim students throughout the country would like to have prayer rooms on campus where they could worship and have religious and social gatherings. The prayer room needs to have two sections, one section for the women and the other for men, with two different entrances. This is not simply due to Islamic rules, but also to the strong view of the new generation of British Muslims (especially British Muslim women) of equal rights for both genders.

Any room with two sections can be appropriate for prayers as long as it is clean. A carpeted room would be appropriate since Muslims use the floor for all the activities in the prayer room/mosque. The basic requirements of a prayer room are that it is clean and that it has a place where one can perform ablution (separate for women and men). In addition to this, it would be helpful to provide toilet facilities, since a lot of social gatherings occur in the prayer room. Many Muslim students have commented on the interruption to their activities in the prayer room caused by the need to cross campus simply to find a toilet.

### **GENERAL ATTITUDES**

Muslims, like any other group or individual, would prefer to be able to study in a tolerant environment where they are treated the same way as their peers. Many would like to feel that they could pray in their rooms or go to a prayer room without being considered extremist. On Friday, many Muslims would like to be able to go to their Friday prayers in the afternoon for an hour, since it is compulsory (for men). As many universities now operate flexible timing arrangements, there is no need for this to be seen as detrimental to a student's work.

A majority of Muslim women and men, from a variety of backgrounds, regardless of their level of belief, would like to study in an environment where the hijab, beard, and food codes are accepted in the same way as other styles of dress and dietary preferences.

## 3. RESOURCES

### FURTHER READING ON ISLAM

Cook, Michael, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000)

Eaton, Gai, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society 1998)

Esposito, John L., *Islam: the Straight Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998)

Lings, Martin, *Life of the Prophet Muhammad* (Hemel Hempstead: Islamic Texts Society 1997)

Roald, Anne Sofie, *Women in Islam, the Western Experience* (London: Routledge 2001)

David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003)

### ISLAM IN BRITAIN

Ansari, Humayun, *The Infidel Within* (London: C. Hurst & Co 2004)

Lewis, Philip, *Islamic Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris 2002)

Nielsen, Jorgen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2004)

### WEBSITES

#### **THE SUBJECT CENTRE FOR PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/themes/diversity/index.html>

This area of our website contains further information and resources on issues relating to diversity.

#### **BBC RELIGION AND ETHICS ONLINE: ISLAM**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam>

#### **ISLAMICITY**

<http://www.islamicity.com>

**ISLAM.COM**

<http://www.islam.com>

**MUSLIM HERITAGE**

<http://www.muslimheritage.com>

**EMEL MAGAZINE**

<http://www.emelmagazine.com>

**Q-NEWS**

<http://www.q-news.com>

**ORGANISATIONS**

**MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN**

Boardman House  
64 Broadway  
Stratford  
London E15 INT  
Tel: 0208 432 0585/6  
Fax: 0208 432 0587  
<http://www.mcb.org.uk>

**THE FEDERATION OF STUDENT ISLAMIC SOCIETIES IN THE  
UK AND IRELAND**

38 Mapesbury Road  
London NW2 4JD  
Tel: 0208 452 4493  
Fax: 0208 208 4161  
<http://www.fosis.org.uk>

**THE MUSLIM STUDENTS' SOCIETY**

272 Dickenson Road  
Manchester M13 0YL  
Tel: 0161 248 0650  
Fax: 0161 248 0640  
<http://www.mssuk.net>

## **MUSLIM ASSOCIATION OF BRITAIN**

124 Harrowdene Road  
Wembley  
Middlesex HA0 2JF  
Tel: 020 8908 9109  
Fax: 020 8908 9108  
<http://www.mabonline.net>

## HELPLINES

### **MUSLIM WOMEN'S HELPLINE**

Tel: 020 8904 8193 or  
020 8908 6715  
<http://www.mwhl.org>

### **MUSLIM YOUTH HELPLINE**

Tel: 0808 808 2008 (free)  
email: [help@myh.org.uk](mailto:help@myh.org.uk)  
<http://www.myh.org.uk>